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ABSTRACT

This booklet suggests how rural pressure groups can be implemented. Listed among the variables of local structure which an organizer is to look for when assessing some particular rural area are: rural traditions, (exemplified by self-reliance and/or independent businesses), geographic and physical links, economic power conditions, social and political networks and key personae for the group. Three case studies on rural organizations are presented for purposes of illustrating differences in organizational size, structure, and longevity. Among the numerous factors cited as important to group establishment and maintenance are choices regarding short-term issues, tactics, targets, and resources (targets of group confrontation are generally persons in power). Among the organizational factors discussed are: consideration of agricultural scheduling, development of local leaders via group meetings, making public statements, raising funds, involving members in strategies for setting up hearings, lobbying, etc. Suggestions for maintaining a rural group (making a plan, incorporating, fund raising, etc.) are discussed and a list of resources for rural organizing is presented.
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Getting People Together in Rural America



A Beginner's Guide to Consumer Organizing

by
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Foreword

This guidebook is an effort to respond to the individuals and groups who seek skills for organizing consumer and other citizen action organizations in America's rural areas. Although it primarily serves the new rural organizer in need of guidance and resources, educators may also find it helpful.

The manuscript for this guide was prepared by Barbara Swaczy, field director of the Northern Rockies Action Group in Helena, Montana.

The Northern Rockies Action Group (NRAG) is a non-profit public interest support team serving citizen groups, cooperatives, and agricultural organizations in the rural Rocky Mountain West. Since 1973, NRAG has helped rural people organize on issues ranging from utility rates to coal development to water rights. NRAG provides skills in community organizing, fund raising, administration, financial management, board and member development, media access, and public opinion polling.

Barbara Swaczy has worked for state and local citizen organizations through her professional life. In developing this guidebook, she drew upon her own experience and others'. She conducted extensive interviews with rural organizers across the United States, and travelled into rural communities to talk about organizing with rural citizen leaders.

The following NRAG staff worked with Ms. Swaczy: Linda Wood edited the copy; Jean Harte and Diane Potter typed the final document.

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Introduction

"Idaho Is What America Was" is a popular slogan in Idaho. Rural people are proud of their independent, self-reliant traditions. Similar sentiments ride on the bumpers of cars in rural states across America.

Yet there is spectacular irony in the slogan for many people in rural America - because rural areas aren't what they once were. Many rural people are coming to the realization that the old ways of individual action aren't sufficient to preserve or improve their way of life. They are realizing that even the old rural organizations and the old government channels aren't always sufficient to do the job, either.

There is a new wave of rural action building. The rancher-based Powder River Basin Resource Council in Wyoming is one evidence. Multi-issue groups serving small rural towns, like the Vermont Alliance, are also on the rise.

This guidebook talks about how rural people are organizing on the local level: ways to get people together. It focuses on the organization of rural people around "pocket book" issues. In rural areas, there are agricultural production issues as well - cost of land, parity prices, access to capital, crop and livestock transportation. While these issues and "consumer" issues are ultimately united in terms of people's economic survival, the production issues are beyond the scope of this article.

Getting People Together in Rural America is, in the most general sense, a guide to rural consumer organizing. It's for people who believe that experience is the best teacher. But, as any pupil of experience knows, experience teaches flexibility. The next situation is always a little different.

There are no guaranteed recipes for organizing in rural areas - or anywhere. But successful organizers do have guidelines that they use to direct their progress. That's all this guidebook can offer you. These guides come from experience and from an idea. An idea of people pursuing their basic needs by exercising their rights in a democracy.

People express this idea in various ways. "I'm sick and tired of them resurfacing Highway 23 every summer, and we can't even get our dirt road oiled." "It's about time that joker we sent to the state legislature started voting with us, not against us." "Who let them raise our gas rates again?"

If you find yourself talking this way, or if you work with people who do, then this guide is designed to help you, a new rural organizer.

An organizer is a teacher. In a general sense, the organizing process described here is an educational process. Organizers help people learn, by doing, the skills for active participation in a democracy. They help a group

think through the elements of strategy. They assist members in learning the causes of problems and in researching solutions. They keep track of details. They question assumptions. They are advocates of the organization as a tool.

Organizers may be volunteer or paid. Groups with paid organizers tend to grow, expand, and last longer, while groups with volunteer organizers are more likely to maintain themselves at a constant level.

Organizations aren't natural phenomena. They are artificial tools created to help members solve problems. Organizations don't evolve: they dissolve, unless people within them are playing an organizing role.

The concepts presented in this guidebook come from men and women who are helping rural people work together to protect and improve their way of life. Chapter One takes a look at the distinguishing values and issues of rural areas, and how these features affect the building of a citizen organization. Chapter Two discusses economic, social, and political factors an organizer needs to learn about a small town or rural area, and ways to find them out. Then, in Chapter Three, techniques for organizing a local group - and tactics for winning issues - are presented. Chapter Four outlines the mechanics and reasons for building a long-term organization, and explores some guidelines for the formation of coalitions. Chapter Four also takes a brief look at statewide citizen organizations that venture into rural areas. The guidebook concludes with a selected list of organizing resources.

Chapter One:

The Rural Difference

There is no single place called Rural America. Economic factors, local history, social traditions, geography, and proximity to urban centers mold the characters of different rural areas. A tenant farmer in the Southeast and a rancher in Montana have different outlooks. A miner in the Appalachian coal fields lives in a small town far different from the trailer town of a Wyoming coal miner.

For organizing purposes, however, a "rural" area is one where the majority of the people in a political subdivision (county, state, or section of a state) live in an open country setting or in small towns. The population is spread over large distances. Most often, the people are dependent on a land-based economy - agriculture, forestry, or mining.

People who come from urban organizing experiences often cite a rural "difference." It is a mistake to draw the urban-rural distinction too sharply. Except for the most isolated communities, rural areas are definitely part of mainstream America. Farm families are reliant on the same chain stores as urban populations. Mass communications and common social institutions ranging from a church denomination to the American Legion link rural people to the mainstream.

Yet a rural difference does exist, in the influence of local traditions and the value of self-reliance, in the basic issues that arouse people, and in the organizing of independent agricultural business operators. This chapter looks at how traditions and self-reliance color people's views of citizen organizations and local government. The chapter also looks at the kinds of "consumer" issues that concern rural people. And it concludes with a brief look at one particular constituency of rural organizations - small business operators. The observations here are not the result of scientific research: they are the impressions of organizers at work in rural areas.

If you live in a rural area, the analysis that follows may be a rehearsal of the obvious. For people who are new to rural areas or who are moving from urban to rural organizing, however, it can be useful. Much of this analysis comes out of the Northern Rockies Action Group's experience in the rural West. People living in other situations will have to judge its applicability for themselves.

Local Traditions and Self-Reliance

In an open country setting, living closer to the land, just about any problem can seem more bearable. Members of neighborhood groups in cities may commit themselves to a succession of street repair, department store fraud, and street litter campaigns. But it takes a really serious issue to rouse a group in a rural area.

That makes sense for a number of reasons, stemming from local traditions and the rural values of independence and self-reliance.

Group Pressure. In the country, the group pressure exerted by small towns or crossroads villages is often sufficient to deal with departures from local norms or traditions. If a road is littered repeatedly, the local policeman or the landowner has time to nose through the garbage for incriminating evidence. Public exposure is often sufficient to stop the problem. Ostracizing the person may be the next step. Or people will just resign themselves to living with the problem, because there are plenty of unlittered places left.

In areas with stable agricultural economies, elements of group pressure arise from people living their lives close to lifelong friends. High school relationships carry over into adulthood - as do leadership patterns. High school student body presidents and sports heroes often get elected to the legislature.

The social needs that draw many urban people into neighborhood organizations are already met in most rural areas, through extended family, old friends, and well-established lodges and social clubs. Farm and ranch families also share a special closeness due to the nature of their business. As one farmer puts it, "Our lives are one piece. My husband doesn't go off to a job I'll never understand. We work together."

Self-Reliance. A stronger sense of individual responsibility and self-reliance in rural areas can affect how people view the role of citizen organizations. People live in a less complex political structure. The extent of their personal power at the local level is more self-evident. A person is likely to try to solve a small problem on his or her own: give the family German shepherd free rein to scare away the person dumping garbage. A family is respected for taking care of its own - and offering help, not seeking it.

Distancing. In the West, there is another factor that people sometimes use to ignore a problem or the need for organizing - *distancing* the problem, both literally and figuratively. When the cause of a problem or the source of its solution is 400 miles away at the state capital or 40 miles away at a county seat, it can become easier to rationalize away the impact of the problem.

Rural Ideas About Government

The value of self-reliance also colors the rural view of the role of local government, and government in general.

Local Control. In urban areas, people depend on government to perform many tasks that some rural people still do for themselves: garbage pick-up, water supply, and the like. Only when informal group pressure fails or the factor to be controlled lies outside their grasp will most rural people get behind government intervention. When a particular local service is needed, private enterprise is generally the first choice for a provider, rather than government. Even a quasi-governmental improvement district is usually preferred over direct operation by the town or county.

While local solutions may be most desired, it is worth noting that many of the rural citizen groups at work today are dealing with "small cities" block grants, federal housing subsidies, and the like. Particularly in areas with pockets of poverty, the aversion to federal or state programs may belong to those not strongly impacted by the problems. There's truth to the old aphorism "any port in a storm."

Conflict of Interest. Rural people are generally proud of their local governments because they are *of the people*. This pride influences how people view "conflict of interest." Unless you have professional politicians, the reasoning goes, you will always have conflicts of interest in a small town. And for many issues, it's true: if urban standards were used, over half a decision-making body might have to disqualify itself.

Yet there are some rural counties where elected officials routinely vote to award contracts to brothers, where a council member with one-third interest in a cable television company votes to give his business the local franchise. While these conflicts may have little consequence locally, they sometimes condition residents to tolerate conflicts of interest at higher levels of government, even when the conflicts financially affect them.

Voter Participation. Those are rural views of the role of government. What about the *relationship* of rural people to their local government? Rural voters theoretically can exert more direct influence over government through social pressure as well as through the ballot - but do they? Many rural areas have high voter turn-outs. In the 1978 elections, when the rest of the country experienced very low turn-outs, rural states in the West had 60-70% of the people at the polls.

Yet, a gubernatorial candidate in a Western agricultural state commissioned an opinion survey in the summer of 1978 to discover what was on the minds of rural voters. The results showed that dissatisfaction with local government was high. It's clear that voting alone hasn't produced the quality of local government people desire.

The same social pressure that can make a county commissioner more responsive may also deter a constituent from expressing dissatisfaction. Fear of embarrassment and fear of rocking the boat are powerful deterrents to even asking a question at a public meeting.

Rural Issues

The issues that arouse rural people (in their roles as consumers rather than producers) have to be big - just to overcome the influence of local traditions and self-reliance. And rural issues are big, because they deal with basic human needs.

The problems are common ones in most rural areas:

phone service . . .	quality of transmission, party lines, inadequate extended area service, cost for hook-ups
electric and gas utilities . . .	rates, hook-up and termination fees and procedures, delayed repairs on lines

propane . . .	price fixing, preferential pricing
health care . .	insufficient medical and dental care, emergency transport system, understaffed clinics
public services . . .	poor roads, no recreation centers for youth, no public transportation
retail merchandise . . .	small selection, higher prices

And the most serious and basic problem of all, the need for new sources of economic development.

In some rural areas, consumers must band together to convince suppliers that a profitable market exists in their community. If they cannot lure in the products or service they need, they may be forced to create their own supply through a local cooperative.

The Small Business Operators

An increasing number of citizen groups are forming in agricultural areas where the group members run their own businesses: farms, ranches, logging crews, grocery stores. These small business operators comprise a constituency special to rural citizen organizing.

Farmers and ranchers pride themselves on their independence for good reason. They operate small businesses in financial circumstances where there is little margin for error. They often have experience in leading or organizing water or irrigation districts, and may participate in marketing cooperatives and county politics. And they hold some strong opinions on what works and what doesn't in organizing people in their areas.

While non-farm rural people may lack experience with organizations, most farmers and ranchers will bring business savvy and a knowledge of practical politics to a group. They may also feel that they are risking a great deal when they join a new organization, because of their business dependence upon local financial institutions.

This analysis of the impact of rural values on citizen organizations and their issues is based upon a rural area with a stable economy and a fairly homogeneous social structure. Yet many rural areas are undergoing changes. Add significant unemployment or underemployment, racial or ethnic minorities, broad gaps in people's income and political influence, and the values will become more diverse.

The most common rural splits - in values, views of government roles, and issues - occur along economic lines. Some citizen organizations, like ACORN (The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) or Carolina Action in North Carolina, are composed solely of people at the low to moderate end of the economic scale in each area they serve.

Chapter Two: Sizing Up a Rural Area

Last week you learned that your phone company plans to ask the public utilities commission for a 30% rate increase. And you have decided it's time to do something.

You're a VISTA organizer. You have been invited to work in a small town of 5,000 to help the residents improve their medical service.

Or you're a staff member of a multi-issue citizen group. Some ministers have asked you to establish a local group in their rural county.

Whatever the issue you choose, whatever your role in organizing, there are a number of factors in any rural area that will affect each step you take: the economic conditions, the social and political networks, the geography. This chapter outlines these influences and suggests ways an organizer can begin to learn how they operate in a community.

At this stage, we're not talking about research on the issues themselves, but rather the context in which issues arise and are confronted.

Much of this information can be picked up along the way. But each element is essential to determine ...

- ... what issues people consider important enough for action.*
- ... what kind of organization can best do the job.*
- ... who should be involved.*
- ... what strategies can solve the problem.*
- ... what forces are likely to support or hamper success.*

This research need be neither academic nor exhaustive. Most of it requires talking with people rather than pouring over books. Listening well, keeping notes, and not jumping to conclusions prematurely are key in this process.

When uncovering the information that follows in this chapter, the organizer needs to ask two questions: What is the actual situation? What do people perceive the situation to be?

The overlap of perception and fact is where organizing starts.

Economic Conditions

The health and history of the local economy, the extent of local economic control, and the area's role in the regional economy affect the types of issues people care about, their willingness to get involved in citizen organizations, and the strategies of an organizing effort.

Economic History. People's attitudes toward their own potential and their community's future possibilities are shaped in part by historic local economic patterns. Has the economy been stable over the last 15 years? Has there been a steady, gradual decline in job availability or income? If there have been cycles of prosperity and recession, are the causes likely to recur?

Some rural areas live with economic uncertainty: a sugar processing facility may be rumored to be edging toward bankruptcy, for example. A local sawmill owner may be talking about selling out to an international, diversified wood products manufacturer. Or the proposed routing of a major state highway may bypass the crossroads town.

The history of local economic development efforts may reveal people's perceptions of their abilities to solve their economic problems. In one rural community, a rabbit production co-op failed due to mismanagement of the wholesale marketing. Half the town had rabbit hutches but few felt that the marketing manager had caused the problem. Their analysis: "You just can't make a living here unless you work for a timber crew." Past experience with bootstraps economic development - and perceptions of the causes of failure - will color people's willingness to get involved again.

Income Level. Knowing the levels of salaries, unemployment, and underemployment can be useful in plotting residents on the local economic scale. Can any generalizations be made about who is out of work? Are there sizable gaps in the distribution of personal income among people in the area? Are there seasonal layoffs? Are a substantial number of migrant workers imported or is most farm work done by family or local hired hands? Is a growing portion of the population retired? How are people financing their retirement? Upon retirement, are people moving into the small towns or leaving the area?

A shaky employment picture and variations in income can point to issues of overriding local concern, as well as to specific constituencies for issues. For example, people facing a sawmill closing want jobs. They may be the key people to involve in a tourism development issue, but they may have no interest at all in increasing the variety of food items in the local grocery.

In an agricultural economy, income levels are tied to crop prices and price expectations during the next harvest or livestock sale period. Are cattlemen rebuilding their herds? Are the sawmills reducing their stockpiles? And in line with commodity markets, are many farmers members of collective bargaining organizations like the National Farm Organization?

Local crop and market conditions are often correlated positive with farmers' and ranchers' willingness to become involved in an organization focusing on non-production issues. Business comes first. When the county wheat crop has sprouted or when a bumper crop of potatoes is driving market prices down, the farm operators will be busy organizing to receive crop disaster assistance or to petition the federal government for a diversion program. During these periods, if a non-production issue can be related to the business, like the effect of an electric rate increase on pump irrigators, then the producers are more likely to get involved.

Land Value. The economic underpinning of many rural areas is the value of the land. Many agricultural people are borrowing off the the appreciating values of their land - many plan to make their retirement secure by land sales.

People don't talk freely about the value of their land or the number of acres they own. But if there's been a recent ranch sale at high prices, particularly a sale to strangers, inflation of land values will be a popular topic of conversation. Implicit in that conversation may be the realization that local farmers and ranchers are being priced out of their dreams of expanding their land holdings.

Local Control. Ownership of major local industry is a prime measure of local control over the economy. Do the owners live the community? Or is it a national or international firm? Out-of-state ownership, common in many rural areas, implies the possibility of the major employer moving the source of jobs elsewhere.

There is often a distinction between the source of an area's income and its largest direct employer. A small town of 5,000 in the center of a timber county may have a locally owned sawmill as its major employer. Yet the sawmill may have only one contract with an international wood products company. Thus, the large company is, in reality, the ultimate source of income for the area.

Despite the romantic myths, few rural communities even approach economic self-sufficiency or local economic control. The controlling sources of capital reside outside most rural areas, as do the owners of resource extraction and processing facilities. In areas where investor-owned farms are replacing owner-operated farms, economic control at the producer level rests elsewhere, too.

Regional Role of Local Economy. Placing local economic factors in a regional context can provide an indication of the area's interdependence, the uniqueness of its problems, and some of its possible economic options. Do small towns in the area serve as agricultural service centers for the surrounding ranches? Are they bedroom communities for people who work elsewhere? Is the area better off economically than surrounding areas? Where are the major regional centers for retail shopping and health care? Are local salaries and incomes comparable to those for similar occupations elsewhere?

In identifying the economic history, health, controls, and regional relationship, you will also begin to uncover local social and political influence. They are intertwined.

Social and Political Networks

Understanding the informal networks of civic, moral, and business influence and communication is a longtime process in any town. Even if you have lived in a town all your life, your understanding of these networks is probably based upon your place in them.

Asking the question "Who is really involved in the decisions about _____?" is a beginning. Are institutions and organizations playing an influential

role or are a few individuals? Is the political leadership identical to the economic leadership?

People. There is a multitude of potential influentials: bankers, grain elevator operators, wealthier farmers and ranchers, health practitioners, lawyers, newspaper editors, owners and managers of key businesses, Farmers Home Administration, Soil Conservation Service, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service, and state fish and game personnel.

That's a list of potential influentials. Yet there are probably only a few who actually make the difference on major community issues. Bankers are at the top of the list in many farming and ranching areas where bankers advise farmers on markets, prices, practices, equipment - and hold the key to the annual credit they need.

Institutions. In many small towns and rural areas, the church denomination of the majority may influence almost all community activities. A major reason for this is because churches are usually key social centers. Particularly in denominations that actively organize most elements of a person's life from dances to church-run welfare programs, the church exerts moral leadership in action. Those who don't belong to that church of the majority may spend their lives on the fringe of the community. In a place where no denomination dominates, however, the churches may have little role in community issues.

The other institution at the heart of the rural community is its school. The school symbolizes one of the most important activities in rural life: raising children and passing on values. There is no other local institution that brings together all the segments of a rural community around a single goal.

The local agricultural organizations, the chamber of commerce, the political parties, the unions, the production and consumer cooperatives vary in influence. The reasons behind these variations offer insights into what local leaders value. Why is the head of the local farm bureau listened to more closely than the president of the electric co-op? Alliances among these groups and individuals reveal communication networks, family histories, party politics, financial interests, old feuds, and temporary accommodations.

The past effectiveness of citizen groups in an area can be instructive in terms of possible alliances, effective strategies, and people's conceptions of different styles of citizen action. Has the local miners union gone to the state legislature to protest right-to-work bills? Have petitions to recall officials been circulated?

Influence in Action. The whole process of local influence converges on local elected and appointed officials. Some literature on community organizing tries to generalize about the power, low ability, and political judgment of rural officials. This is dangerous. Unless the elected leaders have their constituents buffaloed or frightened, there's a reason for their re-election. "He may not talk real well, but he sure thinks good" is how one constituent described his reasons for voting for a county commissioner.

Many times, local officials lack information from outside the community. But what counts is an openness to new information and to new approaches to old problems - coupled with an understanding of the political advantages of progress. An official with these qualities makes his or her community unique among rural areas.

Communications. In addition to webs of influence, rural areas have complex networks of word-of-mouth communication. These networks are respected sources of fact and opinion, because they are comprised of trusted friends and neighbors. Word-of-mouth plays a key role in most places where the weekly paper always seems to be printed the night before the most important event of the week occurs.

Membership in the informal networks of influence and communication is based on economic and social distinctions. In the West, for example, some distinctions (particularly among the well-to-do) go back 100 years to homesteading days. Geography also influences the networks.

Geographic and Physical Links

How close must you live to someone to be his or her "neighbor?" In some Western states, people 25 miles apart are next-door neighbors. In a South-eastern rural county, neighbors may be limited to other tenants in a trailer court. The distribution of population in a rural area, and the concentrations of minorities in certain sections - racial, ethnic, or economic class - often portray the social and economic conditions vividly.

Physical improvements can point to influential areas of a county. A comparison of similarly travelled roads may often reveal that some sections are paved, oiled and plowed more frequently than others.

Geography also has an effect on communications and on people's outlooks. People on one side of the Missouri, people clustered in a creek bottom or gulch, or people living on the windward side of the mountains - each group forms its own networks. A farmer living far from the seat of county government and the business community may have a more populist outlook than a farmer living near town.

Getting Started

An organizer who tried to learn everything touched upon here *before* doing any organizing probably would never get to the organizing. Nor would he or she learn much about how the systems really operate. But there are some things that can be done ahead.

- ☐ Read the last two months' local newspapers, including letters to the editor. What you learn depends on the quality of the paper, who owns it, and how frequently it's published. If the local paper is a weekly, skim through the daily that most people read, too.
- ☐ Attend a few town council and county commission meetings for a glimpse of local leaders in action. Who is testifying on issues or speaking up from the floor? To whom do elected officials defer and refer?

- ☐ If you're new to the area, ask the people who invited or hired you to recommend people concerned about various community problems. Talk to some of the area's "old timers."
- ☐ Drink a lot of coffee at the popular cafe mid-winter, if you're in an agricultural area - and listen hard.
- ☐ Thumb through the telephone yellow pages to familiarize yourself with retail businesses, service agencies, and professionals. Look for large family listings in the white pages.
- ☐ Contact the state department of labor or county planning agency for county statistics on population, breakdown by age and race, income levels, and unemployment. States prepare many of these figures annually for the federal government.
- ☐ Invite a door-to-door missionary in. A young person doing his or her mission in town is like an organizer and may have observations and contacts to share.
- ☐ Talk to the legal aid attorney. Many legal aid societies are moving away from individual litigation toward more class action work. The local attorney in your rural area is probably a circuit rider, and may have a large network of ex-clients and their friends.

One of the interesting things lifelong residents often uncover in doing this kind of assessment is how much was going on that they never knew about - until they took a closer look.

With a general overview of the local economy, social and political networks, and geography in place, the organizing work can begin.

Chapter Three: Bringing People Together

Helping people win improvements in their lives is the most basic reason for organizing a citizen group anywhere. In the course of working together, people uncover an equally central value of citizen action: an experience of the power that people can exert in a democracy.

A citizen organization is a tool for winning improvements in a rural community. There are many types of organizations working toward these purposes. This guidebook suggests that the direct action form is the most effective form to use initially.

The direct action organization relies on numbers of members, and the influence of their votes and consumer dollars. In rural areas, although numbers are fewer, members count. In a direct action organization, members do the key work and make the decisions. Many rural citizen groups have adopted this style with success, because it does win improvements and it gives people experience in democracy. It is also an open tool that can serve a long agenda of issues.

The research and education organization is based upon the belief that knowledge is power. Research is an important element of any citizen effort. But to be useful, research must have two components: what's causing a problem and what people can do to solve it. Researchers have a term for the common situation where people have the facts but don't think they can do anything about them: well-informed futility.

Legal organizations are less common in the rural experience. Among legal organizations, the American Civil Liberties Union is the classic group. Legal organizations seek to win improvements in a community through the courts. Legal action can be a valuable last resort for a citizen group. But the courtroom is the lawyer's world. Lawyers often call the shots on strategy, urge group members not to discuss the case publicly, and leave very few avenues open for action out of the courtroom by members. Members of a group engaging only in legal action never get a sense of what people can do for themselves.

Self-help and service organizations sometimes grow out of citizen group efforts in rural areas. A volunteer emergency medical transport team, a producer or consumer cooperative, and a local improvement district are examples. These types of organizations perform crucial functions. They represent the institutionalization of past citizen action. Without continued citizen action (participating on the co-op board, attending improvement district budget hearings, etc.) these organizations don't necessarily take the lead for future improvements.

Three Rural Organizations

Citizen organizations in rural areas, as elsewhere, often combine elements from these different types of organizations. The following case studies show three very different kinds of rural organizations. They vary in structure and activities, number of members, and size of geographic area served. One is state-wide, another is regional. The third group served a town of several hundred and existed only for the duration of a single issue. Two groups charge dues, the other found contributions were adequate. All have one thing in common: they have won real improvements in their members' lives through direct action.

The Vermont Alliance. The Vermont Alliance has built an organization of 300 people in a state where the population is half a million people. The Alliance has four chapters, all in towns and counties ranging from 2,600 to 10,000 people. Its members are primarily low to moderate income people.

Their first victory came in 1975 when Barre residents succeeded in having a proposed utility rate increase cut in half. Since then, Alliance chapters have won voter approval for an initiative to conduct a feasibility study of municipal ownership of a local investor-owned utility. They have taken action on safety violations in a large trailer park. They have convinced city administrators in Barre to apply for low-income housing subsidies from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Alliance chapters are working on telephone rate increases, and have lobbied on selected state legislation - for example, a bill to authorize prescription of lower cost generic drugs. Timelines for victory vary: it took six months to persuade Barre to apply for HUD funds; getting a speed zone changed has stretched over a year in another town.

Chapters operate autonomously. They are often comprised of several neighborhood groups, even in a small town. In a sparsely populated area, a chapter may be countywide. Chapter leadership is composed of all the neighborhood group leaders, and all chapters elect representatives to a statewide board.

Chapters sometimes pair up or they may all unite on particular issues. For example, the Hartford and Barre groups have worked together to fight a utility proposal to eliminate budget payment plans.

Vermont Alliance chapters usually number several hundred members. One of the problems the organization has faced is how to really involve that many people. Organizer Debbie Katz in Barre estimates that 30-40 members are very active. That's been enough to initiate community action on many issues. People have high expectations of being involved, but it has been difficult to find ways to provide the support for several hundred active members.

Ellen David, former Alliance staff director, pointed out two problems she has found in rural direct action organizing where meeting with a decision maker is an appropriate tactic. First, people are unwilling to make an attack on an individual, someone they have known all their lives. She suggests that instead

of "personalizing" who's responsible for a problem (as groups do in urban areas), it's better to depersonalize the target. People react more angrily to large utilities or out-of-state interests.

A second point she makes is that no one can be anonymous in a small town. People know which of their neighbors belong to Vermont Alliance. They also know what the organizer is doing. An organizer cannot just pretend to be an office manager if he or she is also going door-to-door.

In addition, the lack of anonymity means that there are no surprises. Doing research on an issue is often enough to tip off people responsible for the problem under study.

Vermont Alliance has had organizers from the start - at first volunteer, then paid through foundation funds and VISTA. The base of Alliance funding is membership dues. Each chapter sets its own dues and pays for its local office expenses. The state organization funds the staff organizer, with the understanding that the local chapter must put aside money or find a source to finance the organizer (\$6,000 salary) after two years. The Barre Chapter reached the two-year point recently, and had accumulated only enough for a half-time organizer. Now, the Alliance is reconsidering this local financing policy.

"Members in a town of 10,000 can't raise \$6,000 a year," says David. "We must realize that the current level of a paid staff organization will have a short life span."

But that life span of paid staff is valuable to the group. Particularly in the areas of leadership development, organizing new chapters and research, staff have been crucial. The Alliance will be devoting special effort to intensive leadership development in the future, so that if and when staff reduction does occur, stable volunteer leadership will be in place.

The North Country Peoples Alliance. Across the border from the Vermont Alliance is a New Hampshire group, the North Country Peoples Alliance. NCPA started in 1976 as a group of storefront food-buying clubs serving low-income people in northern New Hampshire.

NCPA expanded into local low-income issues in 1977 by targetting a mis-managed local poverty agency. With that experience under its belt, the organization put together a steering committee of interested people from four towns NCPA wanted to organize.

NCPA has about 300 members in two countywide area councils. There are several "neighborhood" groups in each council - a neighborhood may be a few streets of homes. In developing a council, the Alliance organizes the neighborhoods and works with them on a local issue like flooding in a mobile home park. Only after each neighborhood group has taken action on an issue are they united into an area council. The area councils elect representatives to the NCPA board.

Area councils operate centers which act as storefronts for food-buying clubs and thrift shops, and as offices for the issue work.

Attached to NCPA is a separately incorporated research, education, and technical assistance project, the North Country Institute. NCPA controls the Institute through an interlocking board arrangement. In addition to providing research for the member groups, the Institute also conducts research for local government. For example, the Institute provided assistance to a town in preparing its community development application. Recently they provided organizing training for a local community action agency as well.

One of NCPA's largest campaigns dealt with distribution of "Section 8" rent subsidies. Forty people from nine towns converged on HUD offices in the state capital. Armed with cards showing the number of eligible families, they demanded that HUD come up with a plan to redirect some housing subsidy money to younger families as well as to the elderly. The Governor of New Hampshire met them for lunch and supported their position. They won.

William Bean, head organizer, is concerned about leadership development and is quite candid about the mistakes NCPA has made.

"Sometimes we as organizers were so anxious to produce results that we didn't bring along any new leadership," he says. When that issue was resolved or when old leaders moved, there was no one to take their place.

It's easy to get into the arena of policy debate in a rural area, Bean has found. But people hesitate to take a stand that would embarrass someone. Once a group planned a visit to the local housing director to discuss a problem and demand some action. Everything was set, but no one showed up. Why? The group leaders had run into the housing director socially the night before. He assured them that they didn't need to come to his office. So they didn't.

Bean also notes that the two organizations - North Country Peoples Alliance and North Country Institute - are confusing to members as well as to public agencies.

NCPA originally believed that the food-buying clubs would be good sources of visibility, member recruitment, and legitimacy. But it hasn't turned out that way. Most people who joined NCPA for the food-buying clubs aren't active on issues. Bean says, "It's tough to mix food and issues."

Area councils are responsible for rent, utilities, and phone expenses of their storefronts. The storefronts' overhead is paid through a combination of membership dues (\$4 per year) and thrift shop income of \$70 per month. NCPA picks up the salaries of the five organizers, most of whom are VISTA volunteers. In the long run, NCPA thinks they may have to merge into a larger statewide organization or contract to provide low-income services in order to fund their current level of operations.

Peck Extended Area Service. The story of Peck Extended Area Service is the history of a single-issue campaign and a short-term organization. In this case, the total population of a town and the membership of the group were one and the same.

Peck, Idaho, is a town of several hundred people. It's about ten miles from Orofino, a small logging and agricultural service center. Peck itself has no schools and no doctors - no pharmacies, no stores to speak of, either. Orofino supplies them.

Two years ago, the local telephone company filed a proposal to raise rates with the Public Utilities Commission. Most phone customers weren't pleased. But Peck subscribers were particularly upset because everywhere they called was long distance from Peck. The only local dial service was to the 120 phones in Peck. Senior citizens had to call long distance to the drug store. Children had to call long distance from school to reach their parents.

An organizing committee was formed in Peck. They started by visiting all subscribers and asking them to complete a written questionnaire on the spot. How many people were retired or on fixed incomes? How many calls did they make weekly to doctors, schools, hospitals, and the like? Did they have a car or did they rely on the phone? Did they have children in school? The committee also circulated a petition asking for a local hearing on extended area service (direct dialing into Orofino) as an issue in the rate increase case.

Despite their work, the rate increase was granted and Peck was only offered "preferred area" calling, a cheaper long distance rate. A local resident hired a lawyer and appealed the utilities commission order. The appeal was denied.

It was only after the appeal was lost, in late 1977, that the Peck committee contacted their state legislators. The legislators agreed to pressure the Public Utilities Commission to conduct a special set of hearings on extended area service. Along with this request to the state officials, the committee expanded the scope of their organizing. They approached Orofino people- public service providers, health professionals, the Chamber of Commerce, the big mill employers - and asked them to write letters supporting extended area service and a new public hearing on the issue.

In late winter 1978, the hearings were held. The PEAS (Peck Extended Area Service) committee had kept the subscribers who signed petitions informed of progress all along. Now the subscribers turned out to testify at the hearing. Those who couldn't go sent statements that were read into the record by their neighbors. The committee began the evening with a presentation comparing the value of basic local phone service in Peck to that of other similar towns in north Idaho. Subscribers in those areas could call many more phones in many more places. The committee presented all their facts on large posterboard for the crowd and the utility commissioners to see. These facts stirred up residents who hadn't yet testified: it was clear that they were unfairly treated.

Last summer, the utilities commission issued its order - Peck had won. Orofino and Peck were a "single community of interest," the legal test in Idaho for granting extended area service.

The woman who led the telephone campaign is the operator of a family logging business. She has since been elected mayor. There are several things she says she would do differently if she fought another round. First, she

feels it was probably a mistake to piggyback the extended area issue onto a rate increase. But Peck people were afraid that the rate hearing would be their only local chance to be heard by the Public Utilities Commission in Boise (300 miles away). Second, people from other towns who wanted extended area service into Orofino were also testifying at the rate hearings - and Peck should have considered the pros and cons of forming a coalition with them.

The Peck leader also recommends involving state legislators early, if the decision will be made at the state level. Not only is it useful to know where they stand, but representation of constituents is a major part of their jobs. "We had one legislator who didn't support us and we'll remember that," she says.

As for the future, the leader wants to keep track of decisions at the Public Utilities Commission. Peck people aren't working on any other community problems right now - but the group will be ready and experienced when a new issue comes along.

Getting Organized

As these examples have illustrated, the decision to organize a citizen group is only the first step. Next come decisions about the type of organization you plan, and its territory. Will it be a direct action type of organization? Will it focus on one issue, win, and dissolve? Or will the effort your members put into building an organization be preserved as the group continues to work on other issues?

How large a territory will your group encompass? The decision will depend on local conditions: sparseness of population, where people affected by a problem live, the number of people needed to deal with a problem and finance the group, how far people will travel, and the amount of effort people can put into organizing.

Usually an organizer will make these decisions in cooperation with a few other residents who share concerns about local problems. If you select a direct action type of organization, then the remainder of this chapter is for you. It describes an initial organizing drive, choosing first issues, working within the agricultural calendar, planning an issue strategy, tactics, use of media, and leadership development.

The Organizing Drive

The organizing drive is a fairly standard sequence of events leading to the formation and first action of a citizen group. In the course of an organizing drive, people's interest in particular issues is tested and leadership is developed - because local residents themselves are doing the work alongside the organizer.

Organizing drives generally involve five steps:

1. Set up an organizing committee.
2. Recruit the people.

3. Do some research.
4. Plan and conduct the organizing meeting.
5. Take action as a group right away.

When you begin an organizing drive, it is a good idea to test people's interest on several issues the group might address. Unless there is only one overriding local issue, citing a number of problems will encourage people to add other concerns and will help to define the new organization as a tool for many issues.

Step One: Set up an organizing committee. From the start, the work of organizing should be shared. The duties of an organizing committee are to identify several issues that the group members might want to work on, to recruit people, and to plan and conduct the first meeting of the new group.

Members of the organizing committee should be committed to doing something about local problems. But the members should also represent a cross section of the people you plan to organize. For example, if you are getting a ranching county together on utility rates, most of your committee should be ranchers with solid reputations. If there are several major commodities produced, be sure they are each represented. In a more diverse community, if you plan to organize people to improve the availability of medical care, be sure to include the elderly as well as young families and people employed in potentially hazardous jobs like logging. Identify representatives from all sections of the geographic area you're organizing.

All the rural organizers interviewed by the author emphasized the importance of having respected, hard workers on this committee. The distances and time involved in recruiting people into the group are too great for one person to do it all. The reputations of others on the committee will also assist in bringing in a larger variety of members.

At the first meeting of the organizing committee, set a date for the first general group organizing meeting. (This meeting should be held as soon as possible after contact is made with people, no more than a week afterwards.) Then establish a timeline for recruiting people to attend. Momentum is key for the organizing committee as well as for the people: two weeks for recruiting may be sufficient.

The organizer should keep in touch with the committee several times a week to keep up enthusiasm, to coordinate progress, and to identify and help with problems. The organizer should also keep track of meeting logistics and community reaction, and continue some basic research on the likely issues, their local impacts, and solutions. In most cases, the organizer helps with recruitment, too.

Step Two: Recruit the people. Recruiting has four basic purposes:

- Finding out about people's concerns and testing their reaction to the issues which brought the organizing committee together
- Getting people's commitment to come to the first meeting

- Appraising their willingness and resources for working with a group
- Educating them about local problems and the fact that their neighbors are determined to improve the situation.

The more personal the recruitment, the more effective it will be. In urban areas, organizing committees and organizers go door-to-door inviting people to the meeting and building enthusiasm for the group. That's still the best way to recruit in rural areas, but it's more expensive and more time-consuming.

Fortunately, the telephone works almost as well in rural areas. Many organizers recommend hanging around the farm implement dealer's store to meet farmers and ranchers. If it's harvest time, grain farmers may be waiting in line at the grain elevator. One ranchers' organization in Montana handed out leaflets about their first meeting after Sunday church services.

Recruiting in cafes has met with mixed success. Some people say cafes aren't good for recruiting because they are too public and because people go there to socialize, not to think about problems. If you do decide to recruit in a cafe, send the person from your organizing committee who is a regular customer.

Mass mailings and announcements in the paper generally bring a poor response - unless they are followed by personal contact. A mailed announcement of a meeting is sometimes used to get a "foot in the door," and can prime a person for the follow-up phone call or visit. Such announcements should be brief, highlight the need for a group to deal with local problems, and briefly describe the problems. The mailing should be signed by all members of the organizing committee.

The Vermont Alliance has found that some people prefer to recruit through a series of small coffees in homes, culminating in the general organizing meeting. If you are certain that people will actually come to a second general meeting, or if your population is extremely spread out, this technique may be worth trying.

How do you identify the group of people to contact? Most people find that the "pyramid" of names is still the best way. Start the pyramid when you set up the organizing committee: have them list names, addresses, phone numbers (home and farm), why they think the person would be interested. At the first committee meeting, go over the list and add others.

Organizers find that keeping an index card for each potential member reduces duplication of effort and forms the backbone of the organization's permanent records. Note the results of your contacts with each person, issue interests, contributions, and other pertinent information such as occupation and local networks of friends.

Organizing Drive Timeline

First Week	Select organizing committee and set first committee meeting Start collecting lists of potentially interested people Identify some research and information sources on issues
Second Week	Hold organizing committee meeting Schedule first community organizing meeting Begin recruitment of people: add to lists, send letter, start phone calls and visits
Third Week	Continue recruitment Conduct basic research on three likely issues of concern
Fourth Week	Plan the organizing meeting: agenda, presentations on issues Conduct the organizing meeting: select an issue and plan a first group action
Fifth Week	Take the first action as a group

Step Three: Do some research. When the potential issues have been narrowed down to a few, basic research can begin in earnest. For the first meeting, the organizing committee need not know all the answers. Yet committee members should be able to outline some local impacts of each issue, the causes of the problems and some possible solutions. The committee should know what agencies or individuals are responsible for solving the problems - or should have some notion of what other communities have done in similar situations. For each problem, the committee should have a first group action in mind.

Step Four: Plan and conduct the organizing meeting. A few days before the meeting, the organizing committee should get together to plan the agenda and assign responsibilities.

The purpose of the first meeting is to arouse enthusiasm, to choose an issue, and to make plans for an action by the group soon after the meeting.

The purpose of the meeting is not "should we create an organization?". If twenty people show up in a rural area, you've already got one. The question is "what do we work on first?".

A sample agenda for the meeting might look like this:

- Introduction, purpose of meeting
- Presentations on the three issues most frequently raised by people during the recruiting visits
- Discussion of issues
- Selection of first issue, and a group action to get started
- Discussion of how to finance the group: collect dues and contributions
- Election of temporary leaders
- Set next meeting (in one week)

Sometimes groups invite local officials or people responsible for problems to the first big meeting. This often works against getting a group going: the officials may try to reassure the people that they are working on the issue and that residents don't need to organize. The rural people at your meeting may obey, just because they haven't had time to hear the issues.

Step Five: Take action as a group right away. A new group needs reinforcement of its ability to succeed. It is desirable for members to take an action as a group as soon as possible after the organizing meeting. Members must be involved from the beginning, or the leaders will soon find themselves doing all the work alone.

The group's first action should be planned at the first meeting. Urban groups often set up a fact-finding meeting with a decision maker to cement their ranks. The people in Peck, Idaho, divided up responsibilities for going door-to-door with phone service questionnaires.

One Meeting After Another . . .

Meetings are the staple of every citizen organization. People judge an organization by two things: effective action and well-run meetings. Keep in mind that there are two goals to every meeting, relating to those criteria:

1. the meeting must result in a decision, have a concrete outcome that advances the issue.
2. the meeting must be designed to make sure that each person comes again.

This guidebook can't address all the skills of running meetings. Making Meetings Work is a good, short book on the subject. (See Resources Chapter.)

Choosing First Issues

Not every issue is a good organizing issue. A good issue ...

- ... if won, results in a tangible improvement in people's lives.
(for example, better repair service from the trailer park owner, refunds on utility deposits).
- ... is something people understand easily.
- ... is a new problem or recent recurrence of an old problem - not a permanent condition to which people are accustomed.
- ... can be dealt with by a rural group. The possibility of success must be apparent.
- ... has a likely "win" as the first step.

The concerns that move rural people to action tend to be large. While a new neighborhood group in Boston may choose the need for a stop sign as its first issue (a fairly easy "win"), a rural group may be most concerned about a rate increase, which may entail a lengthy battle with the state's largest utility.

This rate issue may contain all the qualities of a good organizing issue, though. Winning would result in tangible improvement - saving on utility bills. Escalating utility rates and bills are within everyone's experience. Each rate increase is a new rise of an old problem. By pointing out other rural states where citizen action has turned around a proposed rate increase, the possibility of success can become more apparent to local people. And a first step "win" might involve a petition to the utilities commission to schedule public hearings locally.

What to do if a group chooses to work on a huge problem that meets only a few of the criteria for good first issues - like improving the availability of medical care? Break the issue down into phases so that group members can experience some success rather quickly. First, try to get the mobile unit to stop more frequently in the town. Then get an emergency transport system. Then have the county apply for special clinic funding if the population is large enough. If the five-year campaign to lure a doctor into the county hasn't worked, try a different strategy to get medical care - unless the campaign has been a very poor one.

It's usually better to start the group working on one issue together, rather than fragmenting into several issue committees. Fragmentation of goals can divide the group before it's even had a chance to unite. It is often useful to select two issues: one that will peak in the next month or so, and one that can be developed over a six-month period. This kind of early thinking lays the groundwork for a long-term organization.

The Agricultural Calendar

It would be ideal if issues in agricultural areas could wait until winter, when farmers and ranchers aren't in the fields from sunrise until sunset. But year-round there is always something a person could be doing besides joining a group. If you have a choice, January is a good time to start an organization

in cattle or grain country. Otherwise, wet weather will tend to keep farmers in their homes. And there can be one or two breaks in the haying each summer.

Farmers can come to evening meetings in mid-summer if it's important enough. But schedule meetings for 8:30 p.m. and get your business done in one-half hour, because the people are tired.

One of the classic techniques of farm organizing was that employed by the Non-Partisan League in North Dakota in the 1910's. The organizers hired able farm hands who went with them into the fields. The hand would replace the farmer on his tractor while the organizer talked to the farmer about the League.

Planning a Strategy

A strategy is a plan of action on an issue. The elements of a strategy include ...

- ... objectives (what you want to achieve: a circuit bus three days a week, 3-party rather than 10-party phone service).
- ... organizational considerations (resources your group has, ways you need to strengthen the group itself - money, new leaders and the like).
- ... constituencies (members and allies concerned about the problem).
- ... targets (people or institutions who can solve the problems).
- ... tactics (ways the group will press its demands or its programs: packing a hearing room, visiting county commissioners to get backing for a food co-op).

The following strategy chart details major considerations in developing a strategy. The "targets" and "tactics" columns are particularly useful when there is a specific official or institution that may be able to solve your problem. But targets and tactics are applicable even if a self-help project looks like the only answer - because it's wise to exhaust all possible existing resources first.

The chart can be used as a guide in a group strategy-planning session by reproducing the columns on large sheets of paper and filling them in as a group. The final steps after this chart are a timeline or schedule and assignment of responsibilities.

Tactics in Rural Areas

Here is a list of the most common techniques, or tactics, rural citizen groups use to deal with problems. There are, of course, many other tactics - lawsuits and more - but these are ones most groups use first, and ones that most often succeed.

STRATEGY CHART

After choosing your issue, fill in this chart as a guide to developing strategy. Be specific. List all possibilities.

VISION OBJECTIVES GOALS	ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS	CONSTITUENCIES members & allies	TARGETS	TACTICS
1. List: purpose and long range goals of your organization. 2. State the goal for this issue. What constitutes victory? How will it: - Win concrete improvements. - Give people a sense of their own power. - Begin to alter the relations of power. 3. What is the relationship between #1 & #2 above? 4. To win goal #2, what short term victories must you first win? (ie. support of local politicians or regulatory agencies) before winning city-wide or state issues. 5. List steps necessary to accomplish each short term goal listed under #4.	The organization must come out of the campaign stronger than it went in. 1. List the specific ways in which your organization needs to be strengthened: - Increase size of leadership group. - Increase experience level of existing leadership. - Build size of membership base. - Consolidate existing membership. - Raise money - find new funding contacts, etc. 2. List the resources your organization brings to this campaign, ie. membership, staff, money, reputation, facilities, press contacts, allies, etc. 3. List internal problems which have to be considered or overcome.	Who can you bring into this issue to join or help the organization? 1. List: Whose problem is it? 2. For each of the above ask what would they get out of joining with you. 3. For each constituency consider: - Self interest - Depth of concern - Risk - How hard are they to reach and organize? - Who else would they bring in? - Who would their presence alienate? 4. For each constituent group, list the specific power they have over targets in next column.	1. Who has the power to solve the problem and grant your demands? List. 2. Who must you get to first? (See short term goals.) 3. For 1 & 2, list specific names. 4. List strengths & weaknesses of each. (RESEARCH) 5. Which targets are appointed? 6. Over which do you have power as - Voters, Consumers, Tax-payers. 7. What is the self interest of each? 8. Are there conflicts of interest? (RESEARCH) 9. Who would have jurisdiction if you redefined the issue? (ie. turned a utility rate issue into a pollution issue.)	Tactics: Actions in context. Flexible & creative. Must make sense to membership. Must be directed at a specific target. Must be backed up by a specific form of power & not just rely on bad publicity for the target. Ask: Why would each target care about bad publicity? 1. For each target list: What specific demands would you make? Who can best make them? What power do you have? What tactics will show your power? What tactic does the target fear the most? Tactics include: - Actions - Confrontations - Public Hearings - Strikes - Law suits. - Pickets, etc., etc.

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1. Building Consensus. There are times when a member will say, "Before we all go down to see the county commission, let me call my uncle. He helped get two of the three commissioners elected, and he can convince them of our position better than we can." While this tactic won't give the entire membership a feeling of the power they can exert, it certainly can be a time saver if it works.

Use of influence is one element in building a consensus of support for your group's position or demands. Consensus will work only if the various partners in consensus share the same interests in an issue and have relatively equal power. Many rural people believe that these conditions for consensus exist in their communities: groups often begin by proposing collaboration on a project to a variety of people.

The process of looking for consensus can be a valuable educational process: rural group members will learn some key facts about their place in the local power structure. If consensus is not possible, then the remaining tactics in this section are appropriate.

2. "Actions." In organizing jargon, an "action" refers to a group of people visiting a person who has the power to help the group and making a specific request.

In a rural setting, an action can be an important tool because it gives members a sense of their power as a group. It's also usually outside the experience of the group. It must be discussed and planned carefully so that people will feel comfortable - and show up. Actions are generally the most effective initial tactics, in rural as well as urban areas. The size of the group will directly affect response: 10-20 people seems to be average for a rural action. These people usually carry petitions of support from many more.

Role play the situation in advance, and have clear, brief requests. Get an answer.

3. Petitions. There are two kinds of petitions: informal statements of support and legal initiative or recall petitions. Informal petitions can be used at hearings, meetings with officials, etc. You can add to them over the course of work on an issue. Circulating them involves lots of members. And the names and addresses on petitions can form the backbone of a mailing list for follow-up recruitment into your organization.

The number of signers is crucial: when 20,000 people signed a petition protesting an electric rate increase in one rural state, the state utilities commission was forced to schedule night hearings.

In summer, when agricultural people are busy from 4:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., signing a petition is one way they can take part in group efforts.

4. Official Hearings. Packing a public hearing held in a rural area is not too difficult, but getting people to testify may be. When a rural organization in eastern Idaho was fighting a proposed 29% electric rate increase, they held large educational meetings in advance of the hearings. Attendance averaged

200 at the advance meetings and the hearings themselves. The group presented their side of the case, asked for donations, and encouraged people to attend the hearings. They also held special home meetings to help people write testimony.

Another group, in Montana, used large public meetings to arouse interest in upcoming hearings across the state. The meetings were held in the same format as the hearings to give people familiarity with the process.

One of the most frequent "actions" associated with utilities hearings in rural areas is getting several night hearings scheduled across the rural area. This can be an easy win, and it's essential to increase people's participation. A two-hour drive to a hearing can be prohibitive.

5. Hearings by Citizens. Occasionally citizen groups conduct their own hearings. Such events can be used to call attention to problems that government is unwilling to address or refusing to deal with through a public process. Hearings can also be conducted to gather public input for your organization's self-help project.

Another type of citizen group hearing is one to which your group invites the president of the electric utility (if you're working on a rate issue) to answer questions from the members.

And finally, some groups use a hearing-style format to learn more about their issues from sympathetic experts. The hearing format keeps the leaders and members in control, encourages people to ask questions, and counteracts a common tendency to defer to experts' judgments about solutions to problems.

6. Accountability Meetings. Local accountability meetings with state legislators can be useful tools to reduce the intimidating aura of the lobbying process and to persuade a legislator to support your cause. Accountability sessions are private meetings between your group members and the legislator.

Sometimes a legislator will try to invite everyone else in his or her district to your meeting in order to fulfill his or her constituent responsibilities. If the community is squarely behind your group, that's fine. Otherwise, your meeting may become a debate between segments of the community with the legislator moderating and remaining non-committal.

7. Letter Campaigns. Letters to decision makers are good during periods when they are considering arguments made by your group. In addition to those of group members, letters from others in the community can demonstrate widening support.

Letters to the editor are extremely useful in rural areas for public education. Keep letters brief, deal with a single issue, and write creatively to catch the reader's interest. During the height of the summer workload, persuasive, educational letters can be drafted for farmers' revision.

8. Rent Strikes. Trailer park tenants sometimes use this tactic when meetings and discussions have failed, and when a landlord is obviously unfair.

A rent strike must be done in conjunction with other tactics, like a lawsuit. It requires a lawyer, because the landlord will probably sue. Hire a lawyer to check into state law before attempting a strike.

9. Self-Help. Many of the preceding tactics can be part of a strategy to exhaust all possible remedies for a problem before turning to a self-help strategy. It is beyond the scope of this guide to deal with the variety of self-help projects: setting up cooperatives, community development corporations, and the like. (See Resources Chapter for guidance.)

The major pitfall to a self-help strategy is that the opportunities for citizen involvement often decrease as the strategy progresses. Dividing up jobs so that a variety of people can play active roles is crucial.

Some organizations - an ACORN group in South Dakota, for example - use self-help as part of a solution. That South Dakota group was able to set up a funding match for a local recreation facility in which ACORN members raised some of the money through a recycling project and did some of the construction.

Using Rural Media

The quality and public service of broadcast and print media varies greatly among rural areas. One region of a state may have a crusading editor of a country weekly. Another rural community may have a radio station manager who refuses to air controversial issues because he or she is afraid that local businesses will drop their advertising.

Yet rural media do have one characteristic in common: scarcity. The usual local media outlets in rural areas are weekly local newspapers, a county daily, and a radio station. A local television station is uncommon; many rural areas purchase translators to bring in TV stations from the larger cities or from a cable service.

Given fewer commercial media outlets, a rural citizen group cannot rely on those means alone to inform the community of its ideas. Articles in church bulletins and local club publications, leaflets, speeches at club meetings, and posters are important adjuncts to rural broadcast and print media.

Some rural newspapers and radio news departments rely primarily on news that is delivered to them in news releases or short articles. Groups often have had success in getting weeklies to print 500-word "opinion" articles on issues.

In creating a press release, fact sheet, letter, or article, there are two basic questions to answer: Who do you want to reach? What do you want them to do as a result of your communication? The first question will help you relate your issues to the concerns of specific segments of the local populace. Pivot irrigators may be motivated by an article on irrigation pumping impacts of an electric rate increase; homeowners may be more interested in a proposed lifeline rate guaranteeing a minimum price for a basic amount of electricity.

Answering the second question, what you want people to do, is essential if your group wants to get things done. Each written or spoken presentation should describe what local residents are currently doing, and how others can become involved.

Many rural people are unaware that their radio stations are required by law to broadcast public service announcements. "Community bulletin boards" are the usual way stations meet this obligation locally. Yet they often play ad-like announcements for national groups. Stations can do the same for your local organization. It only takes a 30-second script and a few minutes in the studio.

Mid-morning radio "call-in" shows often draw large audiences. Calls by your group members on an issue can be organized in the same way letters to the editor campaigns are done.

More detail on media production and access can be found in publications cited in the Resources chapter.

Developing Leaders and Active Members

The single point rural organizers emphasize again and again is the need to develop leaders - not just the president of a group, but leaders of committees, people in training to take over "first string" leadership posts.

Leaders are developed from the ranks of active members. Without an active role for members, people - especially potential leaders - will drift away from an organization. People want to use their ideas and skills, they want to learn new things, they want support and recognition for what they do.

Groups that involve their members in decision making and all aspects of the groups' work are helping people develop skills for "taking charge." When members make the decisions and elect the leaders, the organization is more likely to do what the members want - to be accountable. Leaders in isolation stop reflecting the members' concerns. They may assume all the organization's work, feel unsupported by the group, and eventually drop out of the organization.

There is a distinction between the leading and organizing roles: the organizer, as a teacher of leaders, usually stays in the background. The elected, authorized leaders speak publicly for the group. If you are a paid organizer or a newcomer to a rural area, observing this separation of roles can make the difference between success and failure. The best leaders, however, possess the skills of organizers.

There need be no mystique surrounding leadership development. You start with people to whom your group listens, and who have some ability to perceive and respond to what is on people's minds. These are two characteristics of leadership "talent."

The rest of the process involves putting these people in a series of situations where they can learn and practice doing what leaders do. For example:

- . recruit people for the organizing meeting
- . speak in public
- . stand up to an opponent
- . run a meeting
- . plan a strategy
- . raise money
- . deal with an emergency
- . support and recognize members' accomplishments
- . budget and spend money
- . teach a skill to others
- . write a position statement
- . keep group communications flowing
- . bring new ideas into the group

Developing leaders is a gradual process that requires support by the organizer - outlining what's involved in a task, teaching along the way, insuring that the new leader is not swamped with too much too soon. Overload can produce fear of failure and can send potential leaders scurrying.

Members may possess strong abilities in particular leadership tasks. It's important to let these people use their abilities to complement others! Different people may also be encouraged to "take the lead" on different issues, based upon their commitment to the issue as well as their skill.

Members have skills to share with each other, too. Although a person may want to write all the press releases, it's better for the long-term health of the organization to set up a media committee where he or she can teach others.

A word on the top leadership. An organization needs different kinds of leaders at different points in the group's development. A leader with special skill in planning may be just what the group needs to move it from a "win" to the next issue. A leader with special skill in motivating members to try new things may be what a group needs if it's mired in the "we always do it this way" mindset.

The organizer should work with as many potential leaders as possible - not only to increase the total amount of leadership developed, but to avoid the creation of organizer/leader cliques. It is sometimes comfortable to rely on an already articulate leader. Yet many groups have faced unprepared the day of reckoning when their only leader gets tired or must devote time to family or job.

This chapter has explored the creation of a rural citizen group: its form, start-up, strategy, tactics, and leaders. The next chapter will deal with considerations involved in keeping the group alive, and group relationships to other organizations.

Chapter Four: Maintaining a Rural Group

Many rural issues can't be resolved overnight, or in a few months.

How your members view the longevity of your group can have a major impact on your success, and on how others will view the group. Particularly if you have begun work on a major problem with a long series of timelines, your group needs to demonstrate that it plans to see the process through.

There are other reasons for keeping an organization growing:

- the group has uncovered other problems to which members want to turn.
- the group needs to "watchdog" the improvement they've achieved.
- people have reservations about the solution that's been won.

Watchdogging is a passive activity that doesn't generate much enthusiasm - but new issues will.

The reason for maintaining a group is simple: most rural areas have multiple problems. The job of building an organization, organizing active members, and developing leaders takes time. Experience on one issue can be transferred to other issues. There is also evidence that groups get better results on increasingly complex issues if they operate together over time.

Groups aren't held together magically. It takes work. This chapter deals with some of the mechanics involved in maintaining an organization. If it looks like your group wants to remain a strong local presence, these "maintenance" elements will be vital. The chapter also discusses group relations with other organizations, and a special option: forming a Political Action Committee.

Moving On To The Next Issue

A rural citizen group organizes to get the telephone company to reduce the number of subscribers on party lines. Six months later, they win.

Now what?

Moving on to the next issue can be the crucial test of how people perceive their organization. Is it an effective tool for different issues? Or is it suited to only one purpose?

Sometimes the seeds of the next issue can be sown during work on the first issue. Other times, there just isn't anything coming up. Christmas holidays may intervene. During these periods, a group can consolidate and review the list of problems generated at the first organizing meeting. Monthly meetings

can hold the core of active members together. A newsletter can keep the group visible to the general membership.

During this period, conducting a new organizing drive can help. It will bring in new members as well as new issues, and offer a format for polling your existing members about new issues.

"Down time" is okay, particularly if the group is all-volunteer. But when the period of inactivity stretches beyond a month or so, there's a danger that the tool may get too rusty to use.

Making A Plan

If a group has cut its teeth by reacting to a situation - reacting to a proposed gas rate hike, for example - one approach to help the group move on is to turn the tables. What do we want to propose in the county to make it a better place for low to middle income people?

Making a plan helps a group turn from reacting to acting.

Farmers and ranchers make farm plans every year. They decide on crops for particular acreages, herd rebuilding, scheduling of work, and financing. A business owner does the same thing. He or she sets goals for the company, outlines new product or service lines, and then puts the plan to work. A basic plan can help a citizen group, too.

A six-month or one-year plan for a group follows a process similar to that employed for making a strategy - except the categories are different.

1. What is the group's purpose?
"enhance citizen role in government"
"retain small town atmosphere"
2. What are the local needs the group will address? (choose just a few)
"better street surfaces"
"reasonably priced electricity"
3. For each need, develop an outline strategy (See Strategy Chart) and fit the strategies into a timeline.
4. Make a budget. For expenses and income, include sources and amounts. Plan to review it monthly. Make a decision on whether the plan will require staff.

Planning is a creative and flexible process. A plan enables people to think positively about "how can we take action to improve our area?" And it enables a large number of members to work together in a coordinated fashion.

Incorporation

Incorporation as a non-profit organization limits the personal financial liability of group leaders under most circumstances, enables you to hire staff, and is the first step toward qualifying the group to receive grant money.

Those are the major reasons for incorporating. Drafting articles of incorporation and by-laws will take time: it is advisable only if you plan to be in existence for at least a year, or if the group is involved in an extremely controversial issue. Often you can find another citizen group that has incorporated, and you can use its articles and by-laws as a model of what must be included.

Groups file for incorporation at the state level, usually with the Secretary of State. A fee in the range of \$15-30 is required.

Once a group has incorporated, it will probably want to apply for a federal income tax exemption. The common non-profit tax statuses are covered in Sections 501(c)(3) and (c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code. The following table illustrates the distinctions between the two. There is an additional category listed, too - a "lobbying" (c)(3). This is a 501(c)(3) organization which has elected to be covered by Section 501(h) of the Code.

Working for the election of a candidate is not allowed under any of these tax statuses. The last section of this chapter, Political Action Committees, covers the type of organization needed for electoral politics.

Federal Tax Status Differences

	(c)(4)	"lobbying" (c)(3)	(c)(3)
Exempt from federal income tax	Yes	Yes	Yes
Election campaign involvement	No	No	No
Income tax deductions for individual contributors	No	Yes	Yes
Amount of lobbying permitted	unlimited	20% of annual expenses*	essentially none
More complex bookkeeping	No	Yes	No
Possible to get direct Foundation grants	No	Yes	Yes

* For groups with annual expenses under \$500,000.

Lobbying means "attempting to influence legislation" in Congress, a state legislature, and in any local governing body. Legislation includes referenda, initiatives, and constitutional amendments, too. Among other things, lobbying activity involves: communicating with legislators and their employees on bills, urging your members to communicate with legislators, attempting to influence legislation by trying to affect the general public, and urging your members to get non-members to communicate with legislators.

The choice of (c)(3) or (c)(4) depends on how much of your expenses you want to commit to lobbying and how much of your budget you expect to come from tax-deductible donations and grants. The application process for a (c)(3) status can be time consuming. A local IRS office can supply the forms you need.

Fund Raising

One measure of the independence of a citizen group is its funding source. Citizen groups that collect their base budget from dues and local fund raising events are accountable only to their members, not to federal agencies or foundations. Rural people new to citizen groups may be particularly suspicious of those whose funding comes from "outside."

According to a study underway by the Consumer Federation of America, state and local citizen groups are generally able to finance up to \$30,000 through their memberships and internal fund raising. In rural areas, with a smaller population, figures are lower...but it can be done at basic levels. Rural people are used to paying for what they want. The values placed on self-reliance can be an asset in fund raising.

The best time to fund raise is while the issue is hot...when you've just won one step in your larger issue strategy, at your first organizing meeting, and the like. People will usually pay dues at meetings, but it's crucial to follow up on people who attend and don't contribute.

Fund raising events conducted in conjunction with the issues serve two purposes at once: raising money, and education. One rancher group working on utility rates charges "inverted rate" prices for beer at dinners: the price goes up with each keg. Another group held a raffle for the price of the winner's last phone bill.

In farm and ranch country, groups have collected from the harvests. A grain truck goes from field to field for wheat donations: the proceeds go to the organization. Groups in timber areas have gotten contracts to plant seedlings.

Grant money is short-lived, but very useful for conducting research, hiring organizers, and educating your members and the community. The turnaround time on grant proposals varies from three to eight months in most cases. Grant money can be dangerous to a citizen group, however. A large chunk of money from a single source may create a false sense of well-being that detracts from a group's membership fund raising work.

Too much money can be as big a problem as too little money. Large, temporary amounts of money can create immense decision-making and administrative problems. Sometimes conflicts over the distribution of benefits from grants can split up a group. Or the large grant-supported project can begin to lead the organization, and the members can become confused about what the group - their group - is doing.

Some organizations, primarily statewide groups in urban states, are experimenting with selling services to members. Illinois Public Action Council is trying a Consumer Services Organization. For \$125 or \$50, CSO offers two packages of non-criminal legal services, tax return preparation, and consumer complaint advocacy. Clearly, the economies of scale in hiring lawyers and accountants may make this program inappropriate in small rural areas. But services like these are worth looking at, if your group has permanent plans.

Coalitions

Groups join coalitions to borrow strength. For a county-level rural organization to succeed in dealing with a multi-county gas rate increase, the group will need to work with people in other counties. If those people already have their own groups, the need for a coalition arises.

In another situation, a group that wants to increase the frequency of mobile health unit visits may need to gain the active support of the local millworkers union, the farm bureau, and other membership groups.

Coalitions - organizations of organizations - can be highly effective. They can also be headaches. Organizers who have built successful coalitions offer this advice:

1. Each organization should bring something to the table: a large membership, money, political influence, strategy skills, representation of a key constituency.
2. Self-interest is a motivator for each coalition member.
3. Most parties to a coalition could find something about which to disagree. Concentrate on the coalition issues. Avoid making assumptions about the other parties to the coalition.
4. One member of the coalition must assume major responsibility for the administration and coordination of the coalition strategy.
5. Coalition rules must be explicit and agreed upon: how decisions are made, responsibilities for fund raising, who makes public statements for the coalition, and the like.
6. Organize the coalition before your group goes public on a controversial issue. Develop personal relationships with leaders of the potential coalition organizations.

7. Representatives must be authorized by their organizations to make decisions at coalition meetings. "I'll have to check it out and get back to you" can make coalition action difficult. However, decisions on major redirection of the coalition may need to be referred to the member groups to insure continuing grassroots support.

Statewide Organizations

Statewide organizations in rural areas can be developed in two ways: an existing statewide group helping a rural area organize a chapter of the state organization; or a local rural group helping neighboring areas organize and merge into a new state organization. Either way can work.

Some of the most effective statewide multi-issue citizen organizations across America have approached rural organizing slowly. For example, state organizations of ACORN (Association of Organizations for Community Reform Now) have concentrated primarily on urban areas, although they have rural groups and at least one rural state organization.

When statewide groups have worked in rural areas, it has often been in the context of a statewide utility campaign or an issue in the state legislature. These groups have been successful in helping local residents organize on these issues. Yet state organizations have lacked, in some cases, the financial resources to place permanent staff organizers in the rural areas. Some of the local groups have remained active; others are dormant between the major statewide campaigns.

Carolina Action (CA) is one example of a statewide organization that implemented a rural strategy as part of a one-and-a-half year legislative campaign for lifeline utility rates. CA, a multi-issue citizen group, has 1,500 family members clustered primarily around offices in four North Carolina cities.

When CA started to build support in rural legislative districts, the utility issue was already well publicized through the statewide press. Rural people started contacting CA, and they set up local house meetings. Additional contacts were made through existing informal communication networks of friends. Some rural ministers talked about lifeline from the pulpit, some announced meetings through church bulletins.

In a tobacco growing county, CA found what staff director Jay Hessey terms "a windfall" - a farmer who was particularly active in lifeline was hired to organize in that county and in nearby areas. He knew the existing local networks and lent credibility to the state organization. The farmer spent nearly a year at work for CA. Local meetings with power company officials and with legislators stirred up interest.

At a local rural meeting, the attendance averaged 70-100 people and CA found people willing to organize locally. Yet only 25-50 rural residents travelled to the legislature to lobby on lifeline. The distance was a major obstacle.

ACORN in Arkansas estimates that 12 out of the 100 Arkansas organizations are in rural areas. Rural areas are serviced out of regional ACORN offices. No organizers are based in the rural areas: they are called in by local leaders when issues arise. But the statewide issues are the lifeblood of many of the rural groups. One statewide ACORN campaign requiring taxing of intangible property (bank bonds, etc.) began with a local issue in a rural group.

The other way to build a rural statewide group is to start with one chapter, as Vermont Alliance has done, and build more chapters until statewide representation is achieved. Until the urban-oriented state organizations can finance rural organizing, it's largely up to these local groups to create their own rural presence in their states.

Political Action Committees

Citizen groups in rural areas are wisely reluctant to get involved in partisan politics. Usually, the extent of group involvement is to make sure their issues are addressed in local campaigns. Groups may ask each candidate to supply his or her position on the issues. Then, a leaflet containing these views is distributed.

In rural areas, political party allegiances can go back for generations. Many groups fear a split in their ranks if they endorse particular candidates. However, some rural groups in the Southeast have endorsed candidates, with mixed success. Group leaders have even run for local office.

These groups have formed Political Action Committees, a special legal category of organization whose sole purpose is political campaign work. The committees are separate from the issue-oriented citizen group.

States vary in their legal requirements for Political Action Committees. You need apply to the Federal Election Commission only if your group plans to become involved in federal races.

Getting Your People Together

Rural places have the potential for prosperous living on a human scale, on a scale where people have identity, support, and an added degree of personal control over decisions affecting their lives.

Helping people win improvements and helping people participate actively in a democracy ... these purposes of citizen organizations are no different in rural areas than elsewhere. The rural difference lies in the issues, the independence and self-reliance of people, and the local networks of communication and influence. Rural organizing strategies and tactics adapt to these factors.

This guidebook presents observations on the rural organizing experience. Its length makes it naturally incomplete - the next chapter suggests resources to fill in the blanks.

But the guide is incomplete for another reason. Organizers learn from experience - their own and others'. This guide has considered the experience of others. The next experience is yours.

Chapter Five:

Resources for Rural Organizing

Publications and training opportunities for rural organizing are limited. The organizing community is just beginning to address the special circumstances of the rural setting. What follows is a combination of rural and general organizing resources.

Organizing

The Institute, a training organization associated with ACORN, has sponsored a week-long Rural Organizing Workshop as part of their series of organizer training seminars. They have published two Community Organizing Handbooks which include some case studies of rural organizing. Each is available for \$2.50 plus 50 cents handling. The Institute also publishes Just Economics, a monthly newsletter for organizers. Rural groups are sometimes featured. Emphasis is on "how-to" and organizing case studies. Subscriptions cost \$12 per year. Contact: The Institute, 628 Baronne, New Orleans, LA 70113.

Midwest Academy sponsors year-round training sessions on organizing and related skills. While it does not tailor these courses particularly to rural problems of organizing, director Heather Booth reports that there is an elective meeting on rural organizing in their training sessions. Midwest also publishes a series of articles on direct action organizing strategy and tactics, and a practical paper, "Four Steps to Developing Leaders." A publications list is available. Contact: Midwest Academy, 600 West Fullerton Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614.

The Northern Rockies Action Group, a support team serving citizen groups primarily in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming conducts workshops on rural organizing, fund raising, financial management, membership recruitment and involvement, and similar skills. The rural support team also provides individualized training to groups in those skill areas and on issue strategizing, coalition building, and media. A quarterly publication, the NRAG Papers, focuses on organizing skills and on strategy issues in the rural Northern Rockies. Subscriptions are \$12 per year. Contact: Northern Rockies Action Group, 9 Placer Street, Helena, MT 59601.

Highlander Research and Education Center conducts adult education programs for grassroots leaders in the rural Appalachian region. Highlander is not an organizing school - it is a setting where leaders can come to realize their own potential to bring about changes in their communities. The Southern Appalachian Leadership Training Program conducted at the Center is a well-known component of the workshops offered. Contact: Highlander Center, Route 3, Box 370, New Market, TN 37820.

Additional readings on rural organizing: How People Get Power by Si Kahn (McGraw-Hill, 1970. \$2.45) describes the organizing lessons the author

learned while working with poor people in the rural South. Another book with a similar title is How the Rural Poor Got Power: Narrative of a Grassroots Organizer by Paul Wellstone (University of Massachusetts Press, 1978. \$12.50). Wellstone organized low income people in rural Minnesota.

Fund Raising

"Program Planning and Proposal Writing" is a concise how-to article for new grant writers. It's published by the Grantsmanship Center, 1015 W. Olympic Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90015, and costs 95 cents.

People who want to raise money through local fund raising events will value The Grassroots Fundraising Book by Joan Flanagan (The Youth Project, 1977). Send \$4.75 plus 50 cents handling to The Youth Project, 1000 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20007.

Other Skill Resources

How to Make Meetings Work by Michael Doyle and David Straus (Playboy Press, 1977. \$1.95) is a practical reference on conducting meetings to achieve maximum participation.

If you develop a staffed organization, Administration of Public Interest Groups by William L. Bryan (Northern Rockies Action Group, 1977. \$3.00) details the management issues involved, from personnel policies to filing systems.

A Celebration of Volunteers by Mary Lee Reese (Northern Rockies Action Group, 1978. \$3.00) lays out a useful process for developing and keeping members active in a citizen group.

Groups who plan a media strategy as part of their work on an issue will find two Communications Workbooks helpful. Workbook I, by Peter Sandman, deals with techniques of persuasion, easy research and attitudes, and a case study of a citizen media strategy used in sparsely populated Wyoming. Workbook II, by Harvey Shulman, discusses how to gain access to radio and television and how to produce public service announcements. Each is available for \$3.00 from the Northern Rockies Action Group.

The Support Center publishes articles on incorporation, tax status, and related internal management issues. Contact: The Support Center, 1424 16th Street NW, Suite 201, Washington, DC 20036.

Tool Catalog: Techniques and Strategies for Successful Action Programs (AAUW, 1972) is a general resource on many activities of a citizen group, from conducting a state lobbying effort to running a speakers' bureau. Contact: American Association of University Women Sales Office, 2401 Virginia Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20037.

Steps in starting producer or consumer cooperatives can be found in two guides: How to Start a Cooperative (Farmer Cooperative Service, USDA, 1972) and Non-Profit Food Stores (Strongforce, 1977). Contact: Farmer Cooperative

Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20540, and Strongforce, 2121 Decatur Place NW, Washington, DC 20008. The Strongforce publication contains case studies of successful operations.

The Cooperative League of the USA also publishes good basic information on co-op start-up and management. Write for a publications list: Cooperative League, 1828 L Street NW, Washington, DC 20036.

Rural Issue Resources

Rural America, a national membership organization, conducts research on housing, health care, economic development, and a variety of other rural issues. They publish a monthly newspaper reporting on rural action across the U.S. Membership is \$15 for individuals. Contact: Rural America, 1346 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036.

National Rural Center is also a national organization with rural research and education priorities. The Center publishes periodic newsletters on rural health, housing, and public transportation. Other issues include rural legal services, education, employment, and economic development. The NRC maintains a toll-free telephone information service at (800) 424-9679. Community leaders may request no-cost individual research assistance on rural development problems by calling 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. EST. The NRC Resource Guide for Rural Development lists resources to help rural areas combat poverty. Write to National Rural Center, 1828 L Street NW, Washington, DC 20036.

The Center for Community Change has developed a Citizens Action Guide to Rural Community Development, which describes current federal funding opportunities for rural economic development projects. Available autumn 1979 from Center for Community Change, 1000 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20007.

Another toll-free telephone research service that began operation in 1979 is CERN, the Consumer Education Resource Network. CERN offers computer-assisted bibliographies tailored to whatever consumer issues an organization requests. For more information, write CERN, 1500 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 800, Rosslyn VA 22209, or call (800) 336-0223.

Rural Groups Cited

Arkansas ACORN
523 W. 15th
Little Rock, AR 72202

South Dakota ACORN
611 S. Second Avenue
Sioux Falls, SD 57104

Carolina Action
Box 1985
Durham, NC 27702

Vermont Alliance
5 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

North Country Peoples Alliance
Box 164
Woodsville, NH 03785